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Rural school reorganization in Iowa

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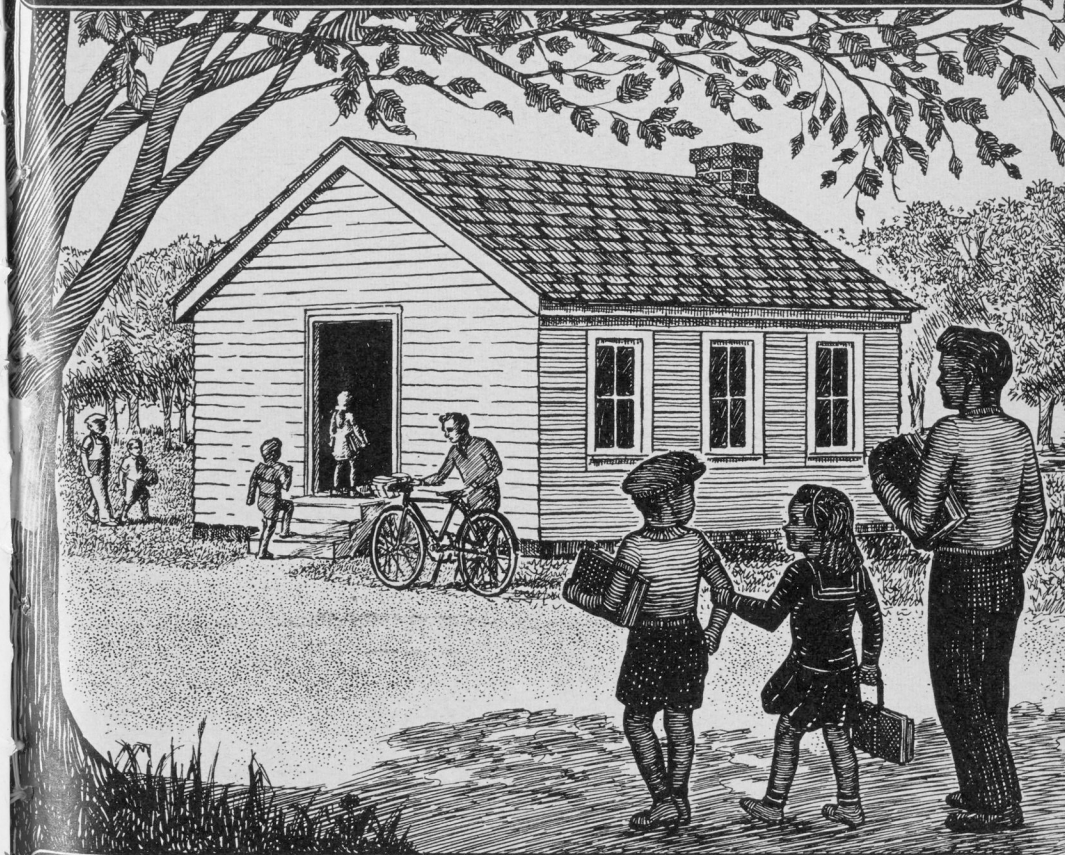
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RURAL SCHOOL *Reorganization* IN IOWA



AGRICULTURAL EXPERIMENT STATION—AGRICULTURAL EXTENSION SERVICE, Cooperating

IOWA STATE COLLEGE

AMES, IOWA

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SUMMARY

1. During the 15-year period from 1925 to 1939, inclusive, the total population of Iowa towns and cities of 1,000 people or more increased by 261 thousand. At the same time, there was a net increase of 14 thousand in the population of the consolidated school districts of the state. In contrast, the population of the farm areas having only elementary rural schools, and of the towns and villages of less than 1,000 which serve such areas decreased by 157 thousand.

2. The decline in population of the *farm* areas which maintain only rural elementary schools was approximately 112 thousand during the 15-year period referred to; and virtually the *entire loss* was in young people 21 years of age or less.

3. In the towns and cities of the state, nearly 95 percent of all children complete the eighth grade, approximately 65 percent graduate from high school and 19 percent complete 1 year or more in college. As compared with this, 81 percent of the children living in districts which have only rural elementary schools finish the eighth grade, 43 percent graduate from high school and less than 4 percent complete 1 or more years in college.

4. The plan of combining one-room rural schools will in many cases reduce the costs of education to farm property owners, but it will not remove the educational handicap under which the children living in districts having only rural elementary schools are suffering.

5. The most effective plan yet tried in Iowa for equalizing the educational opportunities of farm and nonfarm children is that of permitting children who have graduated from the rural elementary schools, or who live in districts in which elementary schools have been closed, to attend graded school systems with their tuition paid by their home districts. The number of rural children attending approved graded school systems as tuition pupils under this plan in 1939-40 was 45,121.

6. The above plan of allowing farm children to attend graded school systems with their tuition paid by their home

districts is unsatisfactory in that pupils above the eighth grade must provide their own transportation or board away from home, which many are unable to do, and for the further reason that in proportion as such plan is adopted, the farm people will be left without schools of their own, dependent upon others for the education of their children and without any control over the schools which their children attend.

7. There are 399 consolidated districts in Iowa, 386 of which were operating high schools in 1940. The percentage of children of school age who attend school is higher in these districts than in any other type of district in the state.

8. The cost of operating consolidated schools is abnormally high for two reasons: (1) enrollments tend to be small in the various grades, the average for all elementary grades in 1941-42 being 15 while the average enrollment for all high school grades was but 18; and (2) the cost of transportation of pupils represents an additional expense which other schools are not required to meet to the same extent.

9. A feature of the existing plan of school consolidation in Iowa which has prevented its general adoption has been the wide difference in the costs of education borne by farm owners and owners of town property in the same districts. A recent investigation, conducted in more than two-thirds of all consolidated districts which include incorporated towns—191 districts in all—has shown that the owners of farm property were paying 3.84 times as much per farm child as were the owners of town property per town child. In these 191 districts, farm owners were paying \$142.40 per farm child per year while the owners of town property were paying but \$37.12 per town child per year.

10. The plan of organizing an entire county or some other large area as a single school district would, in general, provide for rural children educational opportunities equal to those enjoyed by nonfarm children; but it would impose upon all farm owners in the county so organized a burden of cost for education which will be on the average three

or more times as great per child as that which is borne by owners of town property.

11. The inequality in the tax burden per child borne by farm and nonfarm taxpayers under existing laws when the two groups unite to maintain better schools cannot be corrected through state aid derived from special taxes, since such aid cannot be given to one of these groups of taxpayers and withheld from the other after the two have joined to form a single school district. State aid may reduce the burden of all taxpayers in a given district but it will leave the inequalities in that portion of the burden still borne by the property tax as great as they were before.

12. There is evidence that both the farm and nonfarm people of the state are, in general, willing to unite for the purpose of maintaining better schools on a basis that will require each to pay its proportionate share of the cost, as determined by the number of children to be educated, but that neither group is willing to unite with the other in this manner if it must pay more than its share of the cost.

13. Iowa laws make it impossible at present for farm and nonfarm people to unite for the purpose of maintaining better schools upon a basis that is satisfactory to both. A change in existing laws which will permit such union is urgently needed, since the only practical means of providing for rural children educational opportunities equal to those of town children is for farm and nonfarm people to unite in this manner.

14. Legislation may easily be conceived and enacted which will permit farm and nonfarm people to unite for educational purposes upon a basis that will be satisfactory to both. Pending the enactment of such legislation, there is little prospect of bringing about the general reorganization of schools which alone will make available to the farm children of the state the sort of education to which they seem justly entitled.

Rural School Reorganization in Iowa¹

BY W. H. LANCELOT²

I

THE DEPLETION OF IOWA'S RESERVOIRS OF YOUTH

The recent federal census yields additional evidence of the unequal educational opportunities of the farm and nonfarm children of Iowa. It indicates further that these inequalities may help to account for the decline in the number of children on the farms of the state.

During the 15-year period from 1925 to 1940, the total population of the state increased by approximately 118 thousand people. The rate of increase was only about one-third of that for the nation as a whole. Population shifts within the state have also occurred. Thirty-nine counties, or approximately two-fifths of all, suffered an actual decline in population during the same period. More significant for our analysis, however, are the population shifts which are revealed by a further breakdown of the data.

If we take all of the towns and cities having a population of 1,000 or more at the beginning of the period, of which there were 205, we find that they scored a gain which was actually much greater than that of the state as a whole. In round figures, their total population increased from 986 thousand to 1,247,000, the net gain being 261 thousand for the 15-year period.

The trend was downward instead in the 717 incorporated towns of less than 1,000 people. Their total population decreased from 415 thousand to 374 thousand, the loss being approximately 41 thousand.

There was an even greater decline in the number of people living on the farms of the state. In 1925, that num-

¹ Project 875 of the Iowa Agricultural Experiment Station.

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ber was 1,018,000. By 1940, it had fallen to 917 thousand. Thus the loss was about 101 thousand.

From the foregoing it is apparent that Iowa's population losses *did not fall equally* upon the three major divisions of the people of the state. While the larger places were gaining in population, the numbers of people in the smaller towns and farming areas were gradually shrinking; and if we subtract the combined losses of the last two groups from the gain of the first, we have the net increase in the population of the state for the period under consideration—118 thousand.

MANY RURAL COMMUNITIES HAVE HELD THEIR OWN

The analysis may be carried further with results that are both significant and puzzling.

Those parts of the state which have been losing in population—that is, the farming areas and the smaller towns—include (1) the consolidated school districts and (2) the rural districts having only one-room elementary schools together with the small towns which serve them.

When this division is made, a surprising difference in the population trends of the two parts during the 15-year period referred to above is seen. Briefly, no decline seems to have taken place in the consolidated districts. Instead, they have actually gained in population while the areas having only rural schools, and the towns located in their midst, are found to have sustained relatively heavy population losses.

It is true that the census reports do not show these things—for the reason that they report populations not by school districts, but by civil divisions. Yet it is possible to determine the population trends in the consolidated districts with considerable accuracy in both the farming areas and the towns; and when the populations of the farming areas and towns of the consolidated districts are known, it becomes easy to determine the total population of all remaining farming areas and small towns of the state.

MOST OF RURAL IOWA IS HEADED DOWNWARD

Investigations made in connection with the present study show that the *farm population* of all consolidated districts

of the state (including that of the unincorporated villages which are located in them and which are not reported separately by census takers) increased from 167 thousand in 1925 to 177 thousand in 1942, and that the *population of the incorporated towns* of less than 1,000 which are included in these districts increased between 1925 and 1940 from 98 thousand to 102 thousand. Thus the combined *gain* in population of both country areas and towns in the consolidated districts of the state during approximately the same period was about 14 thousand.*

The same studies show that the population of the farm areas which maintain only rural elementary schools *declined* during the period from 1925 to 1942 from 851 thousand to 739 thousand, or by about 112 thousand, and that the total population of the incorporated towns of less than 1,000 located in these areas declined between 1925 and 1940 from 317 thousand to 272 thousand, or by approximately 45 thousand. Thus the total *loss* of farm and town population in these areas having only rural one-room schools was about 157 thousand.

It follows, then, that the larger towns and cities of Iowa *gained 261 thousand*, and the consolidated districts 14 thousand in population during the period of approximately 15 years following 1925, and that the districts maintaining the rural schools of the state, together with the small towns which serve them, *lost 157 thousand* during the same time.

WHO ARE VANISHING FROM THE COUNTRYSIDE?

In 1925 there were living on the farms of Iowa 479 thousand young people less than 21 years of age. By 1940, this number had shrunk to 367 thousand. Thus the loss of children and youth from the farms of the state was approximately 112 thousand, exceeding by 11 thousand the total loss of population from the farm areas of Iowa during that period, which was 101 thousand.

This decline in the numbers of farm children and youth is clearly associated with the declining birth rate among

* The methods employed in determining the populations reported in this paragraph are explained in detail on page 347 and page 348 of this bulletin.

farm people in recent years, and also with their migration to the cities.

The number of farm children less than 5 years of age, which was 123 thousand in 1925, had fallen to 85 thousand by 1940. The decrease in the birth rate which these figures reveal would have accounted for a total population loss of approximately 64 thousand in the 15-year period. Moreover, there was a net loss in farm children and youth due to migration and death, as shown by census reports which would have accounted for a further decline in the number of young people of about 51 thousand.⁴ It follows that an aggregate loss of approximately 115 thousand may be traced to these causes—which does not differ greatly from the decline of 112 thousand revealed by the census of 1940.

While we know how the losses came about, however, we do not know their underlying cause. Why did the birth rate decline so greatly among farm people during a period when it was declining very slightly in the towns and cities of the state? Why were children of school age reduced so greatly in number by migration while the number of adults was not appreciably changed? And why did not the forces which were operating to bring about these results affect the consolidated districts as they did the districts having only one-room rural schools?

As for the last question, it has been suggested that the consolidated districts have held their own with respect to farm population because they have tended to be concentrated in counties in which farm populations are still increasing. This view receives little support from the evidence. There are but four counties in the state—Black Hawk, Boone, Bremer and Hancock—in which the farm population increased between 1925 and 1940. In the remaining 95 counties, it declined. Yet, according to the most careful estimates, the farm population of more than half of the 188 consolidated districts for which the necessary data are available increased during that period.

Another explanation that has been advanced is that the

⁴ The methods used in estimating the total decline in population due to the changing birth rate and also to migration and death of farm children are explained on pages 351 and 352 of this bulletin.

towns located in Iowa consolidated districts may be, as a group, more enterprising than others generally and that because of this they possess vitality of the sort which brings about community growth. It is impossible either to confirm or to deny this hypothesis. Yet among the towns of less than 1,000 people which are located in consolidated districts, there are 96 that declined in population during the quarter of a century ending in 1925, which was about the time that most of them united with surrounding farm areas to form new consolidated districts. As far as this group was concerned, it is apparent that they *did not* possess the necessary vitality to keep themselves growing prior to the time that they became parts of the new school districts. Yet in 51 of them, the downward trend in population has been reversed; and according to the 1940 census, they are now larger than they were in 1925.

Finally, it is thought by some that the farm population of consolidated districts has been maintained by the persistent influx of farm renters who were seeking for their children better education than was available in other farm areas generally. There is doubtless some measure of truth in this view, since it is known that many farm renters prefer to live in consolidated districts because of the superior educational advantages which such districts have made available to farm children. There is no evidence, however, of any notably active movement of farm renters into the consolidated districts. Instead, two different investigations have indicated that the percentage of new pupils who enroll in Iowa consolidated schools after March 1, and who live on rented farms recently occupied by their parents, is only about one-half as great as in other rural districts generally. This seems to mean that the farm population of consolidated districts is relatively stable, and that it holds its own not because many people move into these districts but because those who are there tend to remain.

Taken together, the foregoing facts seem to mean that the decline which has occurred in Iowa's farm population in recent years may be related to the limited educational opportunities of the rural children of the state. The townward movement is of children of school age or younger—and their

TABLE 1: IOWA'S POPULATION TRENDS IN RELATION TO EDUCATION.

	In 1925	In 1940-42	Gain or loss
1. Total population of state ..	2,419,927	2,538,268	Gain 118,341
2. Total population of all cities and towns having 1,000 people or more in 1925 ..	985,981	1,247,040	Gain 261,059
3. Total population of all incorporated towns of less than 1,000 people in 1925 ..	415,681	374,460	Loss 41,221
4. Total population living on farms ..	1,018,265 ^a	916,768 ^a	Loss 101,497
5. Total farm population of all consolidated districts and other rural districts maintaining high schools ..	167,090 ^{ab}	177,456 ^{ac}	Gain 10,366
6. Total population of all incorporated towns of less than 1,000, located in consolidated or other rural districts maintaining high schools ..	98,762	102,382	Gain 3,620
7. Total farm population of all consolidated and other rural districts maintaining high schools, and of all towns of less than 1,000 located in them. (Sum of 5 and 6 above) ..	265,852 ^a	279,838 ^a	Gain 13,986
8. Total farm population in districts having elementary schools only ..	851,175 ^a	739,312 ^a	Loss 111,863
9. Total population of all incorporated towns of less than 1,000, serving districts having only elementary schools ..	316,919	272,078	Loss 44,841
10. Total population of all rural districts having only elementary schools and of all incorporated towns serving them ..	1,168,094	1,011,390	Loss 156,704
11. Total farm population less than 21 years of age ..	478,983 ^d	367,174 ^d	Loss 111,809

^a Includes unincorporated villages, which are not included in census reports.

^b An estimate based upon Iowa census report for 1925 and local enumerations as officially reported. For method employed, see page 347.

^c An estimate based upon United States Census report for 1940 and reports of secretaries of consolidated school boards. The method followed is explained on page 348.

^d Includes persons less than 21 years old living in unincorporated villages.

parents. It is taking place from those farm areas in which educational conditions are least satisfactory. It is not occurring in the farm areas of consolidated districts, in which children have free access to relatively good schools. In areas with one-room rural schools, it appears to have gained about the same momentum in all parts of the state regardless of their economic conditions or resources. And it tends apparently to come to an end when the migrant rural families reach the consolidated districts where their children may enroll in better schools.

In Table 1 a considerable part of the information given in this chapter is summarized, with exact figures substituted for the round numbers which have been used.

II

WHERE DOES IOWA STAND IN RURAL EDUCATION?

The preceding chapter presented evidence indicating that unequal educational opportunity may be playing a part in reducing the population of Iowa's rural areas. That young people from the farms who desire an education find the way much harder than do those who live in towns and cities has long been recognized. Yet the nature of the difficulties which they encounter and the effects of these difficulties in terms of the frustrated efforts and unrealized aspirations of many of Iowa's most capable farm youth are not generally understood.

In cold figures, the story may be quickly told. In those farming areas having only rural elementary schools—which comprise about four-fifths of the entire state—less than 81 percent ⁵ of the children complete the eighth grade as com-

⁵ This is an estimate, but believed to be relatively accurate. The method employed in arriving at it is explained on page 350.

TABLE 2: COMPARISON OF THE PROGRESS OF IOWA YOUTH, LIVING IN DIFFERENT TYPES OF COMMUNITIES, THROUGH HIGH SCHOOL AND COLLEGE.

Source: United States Census, 1940.

Group	Living in cities of more than 2,500	Living in towns of less than 2,500	Total on farms	Living on farms in consol. and town independ. districts	In districts with elem. schools only
Young people 19-22 years of age, inclusive ^a	76,583	32,324	66,077	16,916 ^b	49,151 ^b
Persons in above group who have completed 2 years of high school	62,102	24,935	39,415	13,042 ^c	26,373
Percentage of above group who have completed 2 years of high school	81.1	77.1	59.6	77.1	53.6
Young people 20-23 years of age, inclusive ^a	75,213	31,551	63,019	16,133 ^b	46,886 ^b
Persons in above group who have graduated from high school	49,248	19,993	30,235	10,228 ^c	20,007
Percentage of above group who have graduated from high school	65.5	63.4	47.6	63.4	42.6
Young people 22-24 years of age, inclusive ^a	56,051	23,812	44,110	11,292 ^b	32,818 ^b
Persons in above group who have completed one year in college	10,569	4,560	3,295	2,168 ^c	1,127
Percentage of above group who have completed one year in college	18.9	19.2	7.5	19.2	3.4
Young people 25-29 years of age, inclusive ^a	89,333	37,874	66,471	17,017 ^b	49,454 ^b
Persons in above group who have graduated from college	7,133	2,104	716	----- ^d	----- ^d
Percentage of above group who have graduated from college	8.0	5.6	1.1	----- ^d	----- ^d

^a This group is chosen as a desirable base for determining the percentage which follows because virtually all persons who reach the level described do so before attaining the lowest age named.

^b The number living in consolidated and town independent districts is

taken as 25.6 percent of the total number living on the farms of the state. For the method of making this estimate, see page 350.

^c Farm youth living in consolidated and town independent districts are here credited with achievement in high school and college equal to that of young people living in towns of less than 2,500. Existing evidence indicates that such achievement is actually somewhat better than that of youth living in towns of less than 2,500; but there is not enough of it to establish the fact conclusively.

^d Evidence is lacking as to the relative numbers of rural young people living in consolidated and town independent districts on the one hand, and in districts having only one-room rural schools on the other, who actually graduate from college.

pared with nearly 95 percent in the larger towns and cities. Approximately 54 percent of these rural children finish 2 years of work in high school, whereas 81 percent do so in the larger places.^e In proportion to their numbers, less than two-thirds as many graduate from high school as of the urban youth of the state, the respective percentages being 43 and 65. About 19 percent of the young people in the larger towns and cities of the state enter college and complete a full year there, but less than 4 percent of these farm youth do so. And of the young people who have been brought up in the districts having one-room rural schools, the percentage who finally graduate from college is less than one-seventh as great as of those who have been reared in the urban centers. In table 2 are given more precisely the figures relating to the progress of children living on the farms, in towns of less than 2,500 and in cities of 2,500 or more as they advance through high school and college.

The total picture is that of two distinct systems of education yielding vastly different results and operating side by side for two major groups of Iowa people. Yet the situation does not exist by the choice of the farm people. There can be little question that they desire better education for their children just as do other people generally. This is eloquently attested by the facts that in the consolidated districts they are paying far more, as will be shown later, for the education of their young people than are any other people of the state, and that there are still hardly any among them who would give up their present schools for the one-room schools which they formerly had. Neither is the exist-

^e It is apparently true that the percentage of urban children completing the first year of high school is slightly greater than that of children graduating from the eighth grade. This is probably due to the fact that some rural people remove to the towns and cities in order that their children may have an opportunity to attend high school.

ing situation the result of any desire or intent on the part of any one else. It has come about, instead, through the operation of forces which have not been understood and which could not, therefore, be intelligently controlled.

IOWA PEOPLE HAVE LONG WRESTLED WITH THE PROBLEM

It was about 50 years ago that the people of Iowa first became concerned with the problem of providing better education for the farm children of the state. By that time, several hundred graded school systems with high schools had been established in the towns and cities of the state; and it had become apparent that the educational advantages of urban children were henceforth to be greatly superior to those of the children who lived in the country.

The years which have intervened have witnessed many efforts to improve the quality of instruction in the rural schools of the state or otherwise to provide better education for Iowa's rural children. It is literally true that many capable men and women have devoted their lives almost entirely to the achievement of these ends. Nor have they wholly failed. Professional training has been required in some amount of all rural teachers. Certain high schools have been encouraged by money grants to prepare such teachers in order that a supply might be assured and that all might be at least high school graduates. A system of state certification has been introduced, largely to put an end to the licensing of incompetent teachers by local authorities. Superior rural schools have received special recognition as standardized schools and have been given some state aid. Graduates from the eighth grade of the rural schools have been permitted to continue their education in approved high schools of the state with their tuition paid by their home districts. Rural school boards have been authorized to close their local schools and to send their pupils under contract to other schools. And the most radical solution of all—that of consolidation—whereby considerable numbers of schools were joined in single districts was actively promoted in most parts of the state during a period of nearly two decades.

EQUAL OPPORTUNITY IS STILL DENIED TO RURAL CHILDREN

Beyond question all of these measures and plans have yielded desirable results. Yet it should not be forgotten that the net effect of all of them has been to bring four-fifths of the farming communities of Iowa to a condition in which the educational attainments of the young are far below those of others of the same age in the urban centers of the state, or that it is from these communities that the young people of all ages are vanishing in a truly alarming manner.

The simple truth is that despite half a century of effort to make better education available to the farm children of Iowa, it is still hard for a young person who lives in a community having a one-room rural school to secure an education of the sort that is at present regarded as essential to any worth-while achievement in the modern world. A considerable number of such young people, of course, succeed in doing it. Yet the effort required is greater by far than that which is required of the typical town youth. Very many teachers are poorly qualified and uninterested in their work. Because they are changed so frequently, the school program lacks continuity. Numerous classes and poor equipment make for poor instruction, however capable the teachers may be. Light enrollments and small classes likewise prevent the stimulation of pupils that comes from rivalry and intellectual contacts with other growing minds. The pressure of farm work tends to force the larger boys out of school; and the fact that there are few others enrolled, or sometimes none at all, of their own age makes them feel out of place there. Those who complete the eighth grade in the rural schools must, if they wish to continue their education, provide their own transportation day by day to and from high school—or secure board and lodging in town. For economic or other reasons, it is often impractical if not actually impossible in normal times for rural children to continue their education under those circumstances. And if by chance they have the ability and stamina to go through high school, despite these difficulties, they find themselves facing college, which is harder still, since expenses there are far greater than those which are met in high school. Clearly,

those who finish high school, and especially those who reach some higher round on the educational ladder in the face of obstacles such as these are made of something more than ordinary clay. It is certain, too, that there are very many others, who are as worthy and capable as these, and whose desire for education is equally strong, who still find it impossible, despite their utmost efforts, to reach the goals of their aspirations, and who eventually give up the unequal struggle. At this point, as at no other, Iowa's human resources are being wasted.

Perhaps this is a truer picture of the present situation with respect to the education of the majority of the young people who are before long to be in control of the basic industry of our state and therefore chiefly responsible for its well-being and prosperity than that previously given in impersonal, objective figures. Yet by those figures the number who find the going too hard, and who are lost along the way, is revealed. As has been shown, 19 out of every 100 fail to complete the eighth grade, 57 do not graduate from high school and 99 fail to complete a college course.

Among the many plans which have been adopted in the past for making better education available to the rural children of the state, there are two which seem, in some respects, to have proved relatively successful. The first of these is that of permitting graduates of the rural elementary schools to attend approved high schools with their tuition paid by their home districts. The second is the consolidation of schools. Because these two plans have been partially successful, and for the further reason that they seem to include certain essential elements of an ultimate, practical solution of Iowa's entire problem of rural education, notwithstanding the fact that they do not by any means constitute such a solution in themselves, they will be considered separately in the chapters immediately following.

III

RURAL CHILDREN WHO ARE ATTENDING
TOWN SCHOOLS

A plan which has gained constantly wider acceptance among rural people during the past 20 years is that of allowing graduates of Iowa rural schools to continue their education in approved high schools with the cost of their tuition borne by their home districts. Since the number of farm pupils attending the high schools of the state under this plan appears to be nearly twice as great as the total number of high school pupils living on farms in the 386 consolidated school districts of Iowa, it should probably be regarded as the most effective solution of the problem of equalizing educational opportunity for rural and urban children that has yet been tried.

A more recent measure of somewhat different character is the statute requiring that rural schools having fewer than five pupils be closed and that the school boards concerned make proper provision for sending such pupils to other schools, with the home district again bearing the cost of their tuition. Since a large majority of the pupils in the closed schools are sent to town or consolidated schools, this law, like that above, is resulting in the enrollment of an increasing number of farm children in graded school systems.

The first of these two measures—that permitting graduates of rural schools to attend approved high schools—provides that the amount of tuition that may be charged by the school which any pupil attends must not exceed the actual cost per pupil of maintaining and conducting such school, and furthermore that in calculating the average cost per pupil, the rural pupils for whom tuition is paid must be included in the number enrolled. Thus the rural taxpayers are protected against any tendency on the part of urban school boards to charge excessive tuition rates; and the basic legislative principle is established that the cost should not be greater for the farm than for the nonfarm children who attend the same high school. In general, the same principle is observed as to the tuition paid by rural school districts

for pupils transferred from closed rural elementary schools to graded systems, though it appears that here the maximum rate that may be charged is even less than the actual cost to the districts in which such rural pupils are enrolled.

ONLY THESE PLANS ARE GAINING IN IOWA

That the legislative principle of equal costs for farm and nonfarm children attending the same schools is acceptable to farm people generally is indicated by the fact that these two plans, in which it is allowed to operate, were the only ones for the improvement of educational opportunities for farm children that were making consistent headway in pre-war years. This record seems the more significant because neither plan *has ever been actively promoted by anyone*, and both have been tried over relatively long periods of time.

The number of graduates of rural schools who were attending Iowa high schools with their tuition paid by their local districts in 1915-16 was 14,836. Six years later, in 1921-22, it was 21,125. By 1927-28 it had risen to 29,888. In 1933-34, it was 34,719. And in 1939-40, the year which saw the opening of the world conflict, it was 38,473. The record is the more impressive because 200 consolidated districts were formed during the period which it covers and many children were enrolled in them who would otherwise have attended approved high schools as tuition pupils.

A similar increase has occurred in recent years in the number of elementary tuition pupils in town school systems, nearly all of whom come from rural districts which have closed their schools. Thus, in 1933-34 the number of such elementary pupils attending graded schools in Iowa was 4,646. Two years later, in 1935-36, it was 4,747. By 1937-38, it had risen to 5,832; and in 1939-40, it was 6,648.

Sharply contrasting with the steady gains of the two plans considered above are the contrary tendencies of others meant to serve the same end. Standardized schools are tending to decline in numbers; normal training high schools are likewise becoming fewer; and consolidation is at a virtual standstill, and has been so for nearly 20 years.

As has been stated, the steady increase in the numbers of farm children attending town school systems under the

provisions of these two acts must be taken to indicate that the latter are generally satisfactory to the rural people of the state. It means also that the people who live in the towns and cities of the state are satisfied with the manner in which the laws in question operate, else they would be less willing to enroll in their schools the nonresident pupils who are thus brought to them. It may seem strange that the school officials of town independent districts should be generally anxious to receive tuition pupils on a nonprofit basis. The truth is that they ordinarily gain by the transaction, since an increase in the average size of classes usually reduces costs. There is a further consideration, however, in the apparent facts that business tends to follow the child and that through the children, country and town tend to be knit more closely together. Whatever the reason, almost no instances have been reported in which town and city school boards have been unwilling to receive rural children into their school systems. Instead, they have commonly endeavored to recruit such pupils—even, on some occasions, through house to house canvasses of the surrounding rural areas; and to add to the effectiveness of such efforts, a large proportion of such school boards have actually reduced the tuition rates for rural pupils to amounts considerably below those which they might legally charge.

Taken together, the foregoing facts appear to indicate, by implication at least, that farm and nonfarm people are willing to join hands for educational purposes upon a basis which will require that each group pay its own share of the costs.

YET RURAL COMMUNITIES WITHOUT SCHOOLS ARE UN-AMERICAN

Notwithstanding the fact that these plans, whereby farm children are sent as tuition pupils to town schools, seem to be gaining in favor, they have serious faults.

One of these is that transportation is not provided for graduates of rural schools who are attending high schools. Instead, they must travel back and forth from home to school as best they are able—or find board and lodging in town a considerable part of the time. Either alternative, when con-

tinued through 4 years, is costly and inconvenient. There can be little doubt that this obstacle prevents many farm children from securing a high school education. It should be noted, too, that the difficulty of making the daily trip increases with the distance from the school, and that for those living more than 5 or 6 miles from any town, as a considerable number do, the problem of transportation becomes really serious.

An even greater fault of these plans is that if they were generally accepted throughout the state, farm people would ultimately be left without schools of their own and would be forced always to send their children to schools over which they had no control. That is, if all rural districts in the state should adopt the plans in question, then all rural schools would be closed, rural taxpayers would have only to pay the tuition charges assessed against them and they would have lost all control over the education of their children. Rural Iowa would thus come to be made up of many hundreds of communities without schools. This is, of course, an extreme representation of the case; yet it is an accurate picture of the natural end to which these plans lead.

Such a condition is clearly to be regarded as socially undesirable and, in a true sense, un-American; for a characteristic feature of every community in our democracy is a school, which it has established, and which, within limits, it controls and directs as it sees fit. Any plan which would leave the people who occupy Iowa's farms without schools in which they may take a proprietary interest is apparently to be regarded as undemocratic and detrimental to the best interests of the state.

It follows that these plans, which are finding increasing favor in the eyes of Iowa's rural people, and which have the obvious merits of providing better education for their children at reasonable costs, still have within them the seeds of social deterioration, or even destruction. Plainly, they will not, if carried to their natural consummation, constitute a final, acceptable solution of the problem of equalizing the educational opportunities of the rural and urban children of Iowa.

IV

CONSOLIDATION AS A MEANS OF EQUALIZING EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITY

During a period of about 20 years, the consolidation of small school districts to form larger ones capable of maintaining better schools was quite generally regarded as the best method of providing better education for the rural children of the state. Beginning at Buffalo Center in 1896, the movement made slow headway for nearly two decades, developed great momentum during the 10 years from 1916 to 1925, then suddenly subsided. In 1940, the number of Iowa consolidated districts maintaining high schools was 386; and 13 others, which had at some time in the past voted favorably on consolidation, had carried the matter no further, but were still operating their one-room schools.

Enrollment in the consolidated schools is, in general, unusually high in relation to the total number of children of school age living in their respective districts. Indeed these schools seem to lead all others of the state in this respect. Not even in the large cities is so high a percentage of the children and youth of school age enrolled in school as in the consolidated districts; and this seems true even after full allowance has been made for the relatively large numbers who attend parochial or other church schools in urban communities. There can be no question that as a means of providing better education for farm children, and of holding them in school for a longer period, consolidation has proved notably successful in Iowa. *come*

There is evidence, furthermore, that the consolidated school is turning out a satisfactory human product. In general, its graduates who attend college perform work that is about equal in quality to that of students of the same native capacity, who come from high schools which are far larger, and which are—in the eyes of school administrators, at least—distinctly better. Neither is there any evidence to show that the graduates of consolidated high schools are less capable or successful in dealing with the practical problems of everyday life after their school days are over than are the

graduates of other high schools generally.

To these apparent benefits of consolidation may be added another; namely, its vitalizing and stabilizing effect upon rural community life. Very many of Iowa's consolidated schools are true community centers and as such contribute greatly to the unity of purpose and friendly relations of farm and nonfarm people. Their influence, however, seems to reach even deeper than this would imply. Mention was made in the first chapter of the facts that the only group of small towns in the state which have held their own with respect to population since 1925 are those which are located in consolidated districts, and that the decrease in the number of farm children in these districts has been but a very small fraction of that in other farm areas of the state generally (page 313). Whatever the forces may be that are operating in Iowa to weaken rural institutions and to reduce the population of rural areas, the evidence indicates that the consolidated school is a highly effective defense against them.

Nevertheless it has certain undesirable features. One of these is its small size and resulting high costs of operation. Among the consolidated high schools of the state are 118 whose enrollments in 1941-42 did not exceed 50. In fact the average enrollment in that year in each of the four high school grades of all consolidated schools was less than 18 pupils while the average enrollment in all elementary grades was but 15. Small classes make for high costs, since teachers must work with few pupils and overhead costs are about the same whether classes are large or small.

Under such circumstances, high maintenance costs can be avoided only through stern economies which may easily prove detrimental to the pupils. There is still another element of expense, however, which bears heavily upon consolidated districts, but which is not ordinarily felt by other districts at all. It is the cost of transportation of pupils. In general, this adds from 15 to 25 percent to the expense of operating the consolidated schools, depending upon the proportion of pupils who live on the farms and must be transported. The combined effect of these peculiar cost factors in the consolidated schools is seen in the fact that the average total cost for each child enrolled in either the

elementary or high school grades of schools of this type in districts including villages of fewer than 500 people in 1941-42 was \$113.95, whereas the cost per pupil in villages of the same size but not located in consolidated districts was \$97.54. Doubtless this difference was due for the most part to transportation, since enrollments tend to be small in villages not located in consolidated districts.

WHY CONSOLIDATION CAME TO A STANDSTILL IN IOWA

An aspect of this cost problem which has received little consideration, yet which seems to have played an important part in bringing the movement for consolidation to a halt in Iowa, is that of the distribution of the burden of cost as between the farm and nonfarm taxpayers.

It has often been observed that the value of property per capita in the farm areas of Iowa is considerably greater than in the towns and cities. This is a matter of importance when rural and urban people unite for school purposes, since the *amount per child which each group must pay* depends upon the value of property per child in the respective areas.

A study which was recently completed at Iowa State College revealed some startling differences in this respect. The secretary of the school board in every consolidated district of the state which included an incorporated town was requested to state the number of children of school age (5-21) living in his entire district, and also the number living outside the limits of the incorporated town but within the district. Of 281 such consolidated districts in the state, the desired information was thus secured for 191; and with these figures known, it was possible by subtraction to find the number of persons of school age living within the incorporated town in each district. Thus the numbers of children of school age living within the limits of the town and also in the farm area lying outside the town were determined for each of the 191 consolidated districts.

From the financial reports of the counties in which these districts were located, the value of the taxable property lying within the towns, and also in the farm areas outside the towns of all of the districts, was then determined. Thus the number of farm children and the value of farm prop-

erty, and also the number of town children and the value of town property were found for each district separately; and from this information, the amounts of property per farm child, and also that per nonfarm child, were determined for the entire group of 191 consolidated districts.

The combined value of all taxable *farm property* in these 191 districts was \$190,753,848, and the number of children of school age was 26,255. By simple division the amount of property per farm child was found to be \$7,265. In the same way, the total value of all taxable *property in the incorporated towns* of these districts was found to be \$38,043,323, and the number of town children to be 20,093. Hence the value of taxable property per town child was \$1,893. From these figures it follows that the average amount of property—and likewise the amount of property taxes—per child in the farm areas was 3.84 times that per child in the incorporated towns of these districts.

The total amount of taxes levied for the support of schools by the 191 districts was \$4,485,398. The average tax rate in mills for school purposes was 19.604. The total amount of school taxes paid by farm owners in these districts was \$3,739,587, or \$142.40 per farm child, while the amount paid by the owners of town property was \$745,811, or \$37.12 per town child. The difference in the average cost of educating a farm and a nonfarm child in these 191 districts during the entire 12 years spent in the elementary grades and high school was \$1,263. And the owners of farm property in these districts were found to be paying in taxes the entire cost of educating their own children and, in addition, 61.6 percent of the total cost of educating the children living in the incorporated towns.

Whether the same differences exist in the districts whose secretaries were unable to furnish the desired information, and also in still other consolidated districts, numbering 72, which include unincorporated villages, is not known. There is no reason to believe, however, that the results would have been greatly different if it had been possible to secure the desired information from all consolidated districts including incorporated and unincorporated towns and villages, since the districts in this sample group were quite evenly scattered

throughout the state. That the condition which was revealed by this study is probably representative of that existing in all districts in which farm and nonfarm people have united for school purposes is indicated by the results of another investigation, which was carried on at about the same time in another group of Iowa school districts.

These were not consolidated districts, but town independent districts instead, which included, as very many such districts do, considerable amounts of farm land. The secretaries of the school boards in 160 such districts were asked to give the numbers of children of school age who lived on farms within the limits of their respective districts. There were 91 who were able to give the desired information. Since the total enumeration of persons of school age was known for each district, it was possible to determine the number living in each town. And by referring to the county financial reports, the amount of taxable property within the town limits in each district and also the amount of farm property lying outside such limits but within the independent districts could be ascertained.

In these 91 districts, the total amount of town property was \$19,562,115 and the total amount of farm property, \$24,191,064. The number of children of school age living in the towns was 11,166, while there were 3,038 living on the farms. The amount of farm property per farm child was \$7,960, whereas the amount of town property for each town child was but \$1,752. The value of taxable farm property per farm child was therefore 4.54 times as great as that per town child. The average tax rate for schools in these districts was 23.37 mills. The average amount of tax paid by farm owners per farm child was \$186.13 while the amount paid per town child by owners of town property was \$40.99. And the average cost of educating a farm child in these districts through 12 years of school was \$1,741 greater than that of educating a nonfarm child.

This investigation, of course, confirms rather strongly the findings of the one previously reported, since it reveals an even wider difference in the amount of property per farm and nonfarm child in an entirely different group of communities. If the two studies are considered in connection

with three others, which were reported in a previous bulletin, and which showed that in the state as a whole the amount of taxable property per farm child is approximately three times that per nonfarm child⁷, the great disparity in the amounts of property behind rural and urban children in Iowa communities seems established beyond any reasonable doubt.

Why the difference should be greater in the consolidated districts of the state, and also in those town independent districts which include considerable amounts of farm land, than in the state at large is not entirely clear. It may be due to the fact that Iowa consolidated schools tend to be more numerous in sections where land values are high and that the value of farm lands included in town independent districts tends also to be high because of their proximity to the towns.

It should be said that the inequality in the tax burden per child laid upon farm and nonfarm taxpayers at present in the districts which include these two groups, has not been brought about through plotting or connivance on the part of anyone. People who recall the days when the crusade for consolidation was being pushed most vigorously know well that the people in those communities which acted favorably on the proposal did so more or less blindly, and that this was as true of the residents of the towns as of the farming people. Knowledge as to how the tax burden would actually fall upon the two groups was wholly lacking. Yet they accepted the risks and joined hands in the belief that such action was in the best interests of their respective communities.

At any rate it seems probable that the wide difference in the amounts of property per child in farm and nonfarm communities, and the consequent difference in the amounts of taxes paid per child whenever rural and urban people united for school purposes under the Iowa law was a chief reason for the sudden halt in the consolidation movement in the early twenties. While the actual facts were not understood, the conviction became general that the burden of cost rested too heavily upon farm owners in the newly organized con-

⁷ Lancelot, W. H. Taxable property per child in farm and nonfarm communities of Iowa. Iowa Agr. Exp. Sta. and Ext. Serv. Bul. P55. 1943.

solidated districts. That the movement did not cease because farm people lacked interest in better education for their children is indicated by the constant increase in the numbers of farm children attending town schools as tuition pupils during the years since the movement for consolidation collapsed nearly 20 years ago. Neither was it obstructed by the people of the towns, a very large majority of whom have favored it from the beginning.

As long as the Iowa law requires the owners of farm property to pay so much more for the education of their children than is required of the owners of town property when the two groups unite for the purpose of maintaining better schools, the plan of consolidation must be regarded as an unsatisfactory solution of the baffling problem of equalizing the educational opportunities of rural and urban children. This is apparently the real meaning of the sudden and complete halt in the movement which occurred about 1925. By that time consolidation had been tried in a balance and found wanting. The movement will probably never be resumed unless there is some fundamental change in the method of levying taxes upon farm and nonfarm property included in the same school district, since owners of farm property can hardly be expected ever to become willing, when new consolidations are under consideration, to assume a cost burden per child that must inevitably be on an average around three times as great as that of town property owners *in the same districts*.

A hopeful factor in the situation is the fact that people living in the cities and towns of the state do not, themselves, seem to have any desire to take such advantage of their rural neighbors. *Given freedom to fix the terms of the agreement*, it can hardly be doubted that the two groups would do so quickly—or that such terms would provide that each would pay according to the number of its children, since neither has any disposition to take advantage of the other in the matter of school support. Instead they have no such freedom because the terms are prescribed by law; and therefore they can do nothing to bring about the united effort for better schools which is needed so greatly in Iowa. In the equalization of the cost burden, when the two groups

join hands for the purpose of maintaining better schools, will doubtless be found the ultimate, successful solution of the problem of equalization of educational opportunity for farm and nonfarm children in Iowa.

V

OTHER PLANS FOR EQUALIZING EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITY IN IOWA

From the previous chapters it has become apparent that the final solution of Iowa's rural education problem must, when found, provide either that farm and nonfarm children attend the same schools or that schools be established for rural children which are comparable with those attended by urban children. Moreover, the rural people should, under any satisfactory plan, have equal control with others of the schools which their children attend. The latter should, in general, be of such a size that they are able to operate economically; the cost should apparently be so distributed as between farm and nonfarm people that the average cost per child will be approximately the same for the two groups, and there should be no deterrents to school attendance in the form of transportation or other difficulties.

As we have seen, none of the plans which have so far been tried for improving educational conditions in the rural areas of the state meets these requirements satisfactorily; and apparently the same is true of certain other plans, which have been proposed but not yet tried. Since some of these are regarded with considerable favor at present, they will be briefly examined in the following pages.

THE COMBINATION OF SMALL, ONE-ROOM SCHOOLS

First to be considered should probably be the plan of closing elementary rural schools having small enrollments and sending their pupils to other rural schools. This procedure is frequently urged as the most simple, direct way of dealing with the problem of improving educational conditions in rural areas.

It can not be denied that it is better to have fewer rural elementary schools and to have them larger than to have so many that are indefensibly small. In general, such changes result in a definite saving, since the tuition and transportation costs arising from sending a small number of children to an adjoining district are ordinarily less than the total cost of maintaining a school.

This plan does not, however, solve the problem of providing better education for rural children. The latter are still left in one-room schools, which are rarely as effective in their instruction as are the graded systems attended by town children; and when they have graduated from these schools, the necessity of providing their own transportation deters many from attending high school. Moreover, even when the rural schools are thus combined, the number of pupils is not usually such as to make economical instruction possible. And finally, the people of the districts in which the schools are closed have no part in the direction of the schools which their children attend and are left with no schools of their own. In proportion as the plan is adopted, communities without schools will multiply, giving rise to a condition which is in no sense desirable. Taken together, these objections are so serious as to compel rejection of the plan, save perhaps as a makeshift expedient.

THE COUNTY UNIT PLAN

This plan is probably regarded with greater favor than any other by educational leaders at present. Under it an entire county—or some other large area—would be organized as a *single school district*. It is understood, of course, that county boundaries could not always be followed, since many school centers are located near these lines and their natural districts extend into two or more counties. Yet the necessary adjustments on this account would not much affect the size of the new districts.

Since the entire, enlarged area would constitute but one district in any given case, a single school board would be elected for it; and this board would have charge of all schools, with authority to continue the operation of rural schools as at present, to close a part or all of them, or to

establish new ones according to its own judgment. Furthermore the tax rate for school purposes would be the same for all property owners residing within the new, enlarged district, regardless of whether they lived in country or town.

The chief advantage of the plan in the eyes of its advocates is that it would level up the tax rate for the entire, enlarged district and in this way require those communities having more than average amounts of taxable property to help the poorer ones in supporting their schools. Moreover, it is held that it would result in the closing of most small schools whose per pupil costs are high, and the transportation of their pupils to better schools.

As against these advantages, however, there stands the fact that a county or other large administrative unit would have precisely the same serious fault as that from which Iowa's present consolidated schools are suffering. That is, rural and urban areas would be combined into single, large taxing districts; and the farm owners would have to pay an average amount per child three or more times as great as would the owners of town property. In this respect, the condition in any county or other large unit would be exactly the same as in our consolidated districts at present; for the farming areas lying within the county or other territory would be joined with the towns of the same territory for purposes of taxation. The only difference would be that the combination would be on a far larger scale than in the present consolidations, which include only single communities. There can be little doubt that farm people generally would oppose this plan for the same reason that they are opposed to further extension of the movement for consolidation; *i. e.*, the unequal allocation of the cost burden. If the plan were adopted on a state-wide scale, the owners of Iowa's farms would have to pay the cost of educating not only the rural children, but about 44 percent of that of educating the urban children of the state. (See p. 349.)

It is true that the county unit plan is in successful operation in some other states. However, they are in regions in which land values are, in general, far lower than in Iowa. Under such circumstances, the great difference in the amount

of property per farm and nonfarm child which has been found in Iowa does not exist at all; and *it is precisely this difference* which makes the plan unsatisfactory under Iowa conditions.

THE RURAL COUNTY UNIT PLAN

In order to avoid the inequality in the tax burden per child as between farm and nonfarm people which would result from the adoption of the county unit plan, it has been proposed that all *farm areas* in each county not at present included in consolidated or town independent districts be organized into a single school district.

If this were done, a single school board would have control of the education of all children *in the rural territory so organized*, with power to close the schools, to establish new ones or to send the rural children as tuition pupils to town or consolidated schools.

Since no towns would be included in the rural county unit, the wide variation in the amount of property and the consequent tax burden per child, which stood as the chief objection to the county unit plan, would not exist in the rural county unit. In order to achieve this result, however, other objectionable features, which seem hardly less serious, are frankly accepted.

Since high schools are already so near together in most parts of the state that enrollments tend to be too small for economical instruction, it may be assumed that very few new ones would be established in the open country under the rural county unit plan. In general, therefore, pupils would have to be sent from these districts to the town and consolidated high schools. The pressure would doubtless be strong under this plan to close all but the larger one-room schools, and eventually even these would probably be closed. Thus the tendency would almost certainly be to transfer rural children from their present schools to better ones—which is highly desirable. At the same time, however, the rural people would be giving up their own schools, sending their children to schools over which they have no control whatsoever and, in general, becoming dependent upon others for the education of their children. If the plan were adopted

on a state-wide scale, it would apparently not be long before Iowa's rural areas would come to consist for the most part of farm communities without schools. While it is perhaps preferable in some respects to the county unit plan, it still does not constitute a satisfactory solution of Iowa's rural education problem.

THE PROBLEM CANNOT BE SOLVED THROUGH STATE AID

Still another plan for equalizing the cost burden when the farm and nonfarm areas of any given community unite under the present law for the purpose of maintaining better schools is that of having the state raise a considerable part of the necessary revenue for schools and distribute it back to the local districts.

It is argued that if the state should collect a substantial portion of the amount needed by the schools and pass it back to the local districts, the tax rates of the latter would be correspondingly reduced and the inequality in the tax burden per farm and nonfarm child diminished in the same proportion. Furthermore, it is claimed by advocates of the plan that since the amount raised by the state would probably be derived for the most part from special taxes, of which urban people are thought to pay a larger share than do rural people, the amount of school taxes per child borne by these two groups would be equalized.

There can be no question that state aid may be employed to bring about, directly or indirectly, an adjustment in the tax burdens of various groups of property owners, though there are, as we shall presently see, rather definite limits as to what may be accomplished through its use. If, for example, the state should assume transportation costs of all rural children who attend graded school systems, it would relieve farm people of a serious burden which falls upon them solely because they live on the land. The cost of transportation is an additional expense beyond what other people must pay for the education of their children; and it increases the average cost of educating farm children by approximately one third. In a true sense, this added burden of expense represents a penalty which the state of Iowa imposes upon the people who carry on her basic industry.

Furthermore, state aid may be employed to keep the tax rates of communities having relatively small amounts of taxable property per capita within reasonable limits. Iowa has a considerable number of communities in which tax rates equal to those prevailing elsewhere in the state are entirely inadequate to maintain satisfactory schools. The people of these communities may therefore have good schools only by paying abnormally high tax rates, notwithstanding they are less able to bear such rates than are those who live in other sections generally. Obviously state aid may equitably be used to supplement the funds that can be raised in these relatively weak districts through the payment of tax rates equal to those borne by people living in other parts of Iowa.

The adoption of both of the above plans seems justified by the conditions existing in Iowa at present. Yet if both were adopted, only a beginning would have been made toward the correction of the present inequality in the costs of educating farm and nonfarm children when both groups live in the same school district. Neither does there seem to be any way by which these costs may be further equalized through state aid, since state funds would be given to each district as a whole rather than to some particular group of taxpayers in it. Farm and nonfarm taxpayers would receive precisely the same benefits in relation to the total school taxes levied against them; and after such benefits were received, the amounts still remaining to be raised through local property taxes would be, on the average, three or more times as great per child for farm owners as for owners of nonfarm property. It follows that while state aid may reduce the property tax burdens of all, which is highly desirable, it cannot really equalize them as between farm and nonfarm taxpayers.

In the formation of new school districts through the union of rural and town people, this failure of state aid to equalize educational costs per child for the two groups may be clearly seen. As an example, we may take a typical small town in which the school tax rate at present is approximately 26 mills, and which is surrounded by a farming territory whose average tax rate for schools is 7 mills. If the two areas should unite for school purposes, the new tax rate would

be approximately 15 mills; and if the state should pay one third of this amount, which would be a larger proportion than has yet been suggested in any quarter, the school tax rate for the entire district would be reduced to 10 mills.

The net result, then, of the union of the two areas into a single school district with the state paying one third of the cost of operating the new school system would be an increase in the tax rate of the farm property owners from 7 to 10 mills and a decrease in the rate paid by town property owners from 26 to 10 mills. It follows that the entire amount of the state aid would in effect have gone to the owners of town property in the form of lower taxes. Moreover—and this should not be overlooked—in paying the new property tax rate of 10 mills, the farm people would have to pay three or more times as much per farm child as the owners of town property would pay per town child.

This case is in every sense typical. With certain minor variations in the rates of local school taxes, similar results would follow in nearly all Iowa communities if farm and nonfarm areas should unite to form new school districts and if the state should assume as much as one third of the total cost of the schools. Moreover, the results would be the same for a large majority of the counties of the state if they should be reorganized under the county unit plan, since the rural and urban tax rates for schools on a county-wide basis do not usually differ greatly from those given above.

It appears doubtful whether more than one third of the total cost of maintaining and operating our public schools should be paid by the state if the money is derived from special taxes for the reason that the yields of such taxes fluctuate widely with economic conditions, and the schools can not operate efficiently on so uncertain a basis. On the other hand, if the state funds are derived not from special taxes but from property taxes instead, then the unequal burden as between farm and nonfarm taxpayers would not be corrected by state aid at all, since the state revenues distributed to the local districts would have been raised through property tax levies requiring farm owners to pay three or more times as much per farm child as urban taxpayers would be required to pay per nonfarm child.

VI

SOME UNEXPLORED POSSIBILITIES OF
SOLVING IOWA'S EDUCATIONAL
RIDDLE

It still remains for Iowa to devise a plan whereby people of country and town can be included in the same school districts upon a basis that is acceptable to both groups. Viewed realistically, that basis appears to be the payment in any given district of approximately the same average amount per school child by the two groups—for the reason that *neither will voluntarily join with the other*, knowing that it must pay materially more than the other for the education of its children. Since such a basis seems acceptable to both farm and nonfarm people, and since they could be expected to unite upon that basis increasingly in the future, its adoption would clearly serve the vital interests of the state. Moreover, it represents the identical principle which has been officially recognized by the General Assembly of Iowa in fixing tuition rates for rural pupils in town school systems. Yet they can not unite on this basis at present, since the law requires not that the cost per child, but that the property tax rates, must be the same for all taxpayers in a given school district in which farm and nonfarm people have united for the purpose of providing better education for their children.

This appears to be the real obstacle to a basic reorganization of Iowa's school districts that would give to our rural children the same educational advantages that are provided for other children. The principle which is established by law is not acceptable to rural taxpayers; and the principle which would be acceptable to farm and nonfarm taxpayers alike is forbidden by law.

A fundamental truth which should not be forgotten is that both groups have long been accustomed to *bearing the cost of educating their own children*. This is what the districts with the one-room rural schools have always done; and it is what the town independent districts have done from the time of their formation. Each appears fully willing to unite with the other on this basis; but rural taxpayers are not,

in general, willing to enter into a compact which would require them to pay the entire cost of educating their own children and, in addition, a relatively large part—it would average about 44 percent for the state as a whole⁸—of the cost of educating the urban children of their respective communities. Naturally, the owners of town property have no complaint to make on this score; yet this does not imply that they are seeking or really desire the advantage which the law gives them when they join with the farm people of their communities for the purpose of maintaining better schools. It seems strange that, with each of the two great groups, which together *comprise Iowa's total population*, fully accustomed through long experience to paying for the education of their own children, the law should permit them to unite for the improvement of their schools only on a basis which requires one of the groups to pay three times as much as the other in proportion to the number of its children. There is nothing strange, however, in the fact that this group should have refused to go through with the program of state-wide consolidation when it discovered how strongly the law in question operated against it.

From the foregoing it appears that the only possible solution of the problem of providing for Iowa's farm children educational advantages equal to those available to urban children generally must lie in the discovery of a plan whereby the burden of cost will be laid upon farm and nonfarm taxpayers in a manner satisfactory to both when these groups desire to unite to form new school districts. In a satisfactory adjustment of the cost burden, the ultimate answer must be found; and until such adjustment is brought about, all further efforts to effect a state-wide reorganization of Iowa's schools will probably prove futile.

A POSSIBLE SOLUTION IN A DIFFERENT METHOD OF LEVYING TAXES

A plan which has been proposed for the attainment of this end, and which challenges attention because of its directness and simplicity, is that of authorizing school boards in districts including farm and nonfarm areas to levy taxes

⁸ For the method by which this percentage was determined, see page 349.

in such a manner that the average amount paid per pupil will be equal for the two groups of taxpayers. Such a plan would permit rural and urban people to join freely in creating and maintaining better schools, but with each group paying for the education of its own children.

Under this plan, the school board of any district including farm and nonfarm areas would determine the total budget for the school precisely as it does at present. The amount of money to be raised per pupil would then be determined. This amount multiplied by the number of farm children of school age living in the district would give the total amount of taxes to be levied upon farm property; and the same amount multiplied by the number of school age children living in the town would give the total school tax to be levied upon town property. The tax levy in mills for each area would then be whatever was required to raise its share of the cost of maintaining the schools.

There is a possibility that the plan might, if enacted into law, be regarded as class legislation and therefore nullified by the courts. However, in view of the facts that such a law would be merely permissive in character and would therefore become effective in any given community only when voluntarily accepted by both groups, that it would simply remedy an unsatisfactory economic relation between the two groups which together make up the total population of the state, that it would be general in its application and that it would unquestionably be in the public interest, it appears doubtful whether such adverse action would be taken by the courts. If it were taken, however, it seems that an effort to amend the constitution of the state in such a manner as to permit the levying of school taxes so that the average cost per pupil will be the same when rural and urban areas unite to form new school districts might be considered. Certainly the matter at issue—the removal of the educational handicap from the rural children of the state—is sufficiently important to warrant such action; and since there would probably be little or no opposition to such an amendment, the effort required to secure its adoption would probably not be very great.

A NEW TYPE OF SCHOOL DISTRICT AS A POSSIBLE SOLUTION

Another novel suggestion is that the situation calls for the invention of a special type of school district which will permit cooperative action by rural and town areas in the administration of schools while they maintain their identities as separate taxing units. By this plan, all question of constitutionality would apparently be avoided, since rural and urban areas would constitute separate taxing districts, and no reason would exist why their tax rates should be the same.

Such districts might apparently be quite simple in their internal organization. The entire rural area, which should, in general, comprise the total trade territory of a given town, would be organized as a single school district. This district would then join with the town independent district in the administration of a school system for the entire rural and urban area—that is, for the entire community. In practice, each district would elect its own school board of perhaps three persons; and the six persons so chosen, together with one elected at large, would constitute a board of seven, which would have full control of the community independent school. It would function in all matters of administration and management just as other school boards do at present, even determining the total annual budget for the entire school system. At that point, it would separate into two bodies of three, one of which would be the board for the rural district and the other, the board for the town district, with the member at large temporarily on the side lines. Each of these boards would then determine the school tax levy for its own district, after which all seven members would come together again for business as usual for another year.

A variation of this plan, which may represent the best solution of the problem yet found, demands legislation providing that every school district which includes both farm and nonfarm property shall be regarded henceforth as two separate districts *for purposes of taxation and equalization*, and that these districts shall contribute toward the support of the local schools in proportion to their respective numbers of children of school age. Such a law would apply

not only to consolidated or reorganized districts of every description but to all town independent districts which include farm lands.

Objections to these plans may readily be found. Some of them are unquestionably valid. However, it should be noted that the plans in question meet all of the requirements named in the opening paragraph of the preceding chapter. In this respect they seem to stand apart from all others that have been tried or proposed. Because of their obvious imperfections, however, they cannot, in their present form, be regarded as acceptable solutions of the problem of rural school reorganization in Iowa. They have been presented merely as evidence indicating that a successful solution lies within the bounds of possibility and may not prove very difficult to find.

The crucial need is for more and better thinking on the problem than has yet been done in Iowa. Its nature is now quite well understood—which represents an important forward step. New approaches should be tried and new plans devised; for only in this way may the one that is best be caused to emerge. The call is urgent, as a revision of Iowa's school laws impends, for all people who wish the farm boys and girls of Iowa to have an equal chance with others to secure an education to pool their thought and efforts for the accomplishment of that end.

APPENDIX

I

Property per Child of School Age, Farm and Nonfarm, in
191 Iowa Consolidated Districts, 1941-43

1. Total population of 191 incorporated towns located in consolidated districts included in investigation	83,874
2. Total number of farm children of school age in 191 districts	26,255
3. Taxable valuation of farm property per farm child	\$7,265
4. Total number of nonfarm children of school age in 191 districts	20,093
5. Taxable valuation of nonfarm property per nonfarm child	\$1,893
6. Ratio of farm property per child to non-farm property per child	3.84
7. Percentage of town people who are of school age	23.96
8. Distribution of children of school age: farm, 56.65% ; nonfarm, 43.35%.	
9. Total taxable valuation of farm and non-farm property in 191 districts	\$228,797,171
a. Taxable valuation of farm property	\$190,753,848
b. Taxable valuation of nonfarm property	\$ 38,043,323
10. Total school tax levied in 191 districts	\$4,485,398
11. Average school tax levy in mills	19.604
12. Average school tax levied per child of school age	\$96.78
13. Total school tax paid by farm owners	\$3,739,587
14. Total school tax paid by town property owners	\$745,811
15. Total school tax paid by farm owners per farm child	\$142.40

16. Total school tax paid by town property owners per nonfarm child	\$ 37.12
17. Total cost of educating farm child through 12 years	\$1,708.80
18. Total cost of educating nonfarm child through 12 years	\$445.44

Note: In the 191 districts included in this investigation, taxes paid by farm owners were sufficient to pay the cost of educating all farm children and, in addition, 61.64 percent of the cost of educating all nonfarm children.

APPENDIX

II

Estimate of Total Farm Population in 1925 of All Iowa Consolidated and Other Rural Districts Maintaining High Schools and of All Incorporated Towns of Less Than 1,000 Included in Such Districts

1. Total number of farm children 5 to 21 years of age in 188 consolidated districts in 1925	27,446
2. Total number of farm children in same districts in 1942-43	26,178
3. Percentage ratio of latter number above to former number	95.38
4. Total number of farm children in 1942-43 in <i>all</i> consolidated and other rural districts maintaining high schools in Iowa	57,904
5. Estimated number of farm children in same districts in 1925 (found by dividing 57,904 by .9538)	60,720
6. Percentage of total Iowa farm population in 1925 who were of school age	36.34
7. Estimated total farm population in 1925 of all consolidated and other rural districts maintaining high schools ($60,720 \div .3634$)	167,090
8. Estimated total population in 1925 of all consolidated districts and other rural districts maintaining high schools, and of all incorporated towns of less than 1,000 located in such districts	265,852

APPENDIX

III

**Estimate of Total Farm Population in 1942-43 of All Iowa
Consolidated and Other Rural Districts Maintaining
High Schools and of All Incorporated Towns of
Less Than 1,000 Included in Such Districts**

1. Total population in 1940 of 191 incorporated towns located in consolidated school districts in Iowa	83,874
2. Total number of persons of school age (5-21) living in above incorporated towns	20,093
3. Percentage of total population of above towns who are of school age	23.96
4. Total population of <i>all</i> incorporated towns located in Iowa consolidated districts and other rural districts maintaining high schools	135,755
5. Total estimated number of children of school age in all above incorporated towns (23.96% of 135,755)	32,527
6. Total enumeration of persons of school age in all consolidated and other rural districts maintaining high schools, as shown by published reports supplemented by correspondence	90,941
7. Total number of children of school age <i>living on farms</i> in all consolidated and other rural districts maintaining high schools, found by subtracting 32,527 from 90,941	57,904
8. Percentage of total farm population of Iowa in 1940 who were of school age	32.63
9. Total estimated farm population of all consolidated and other rural districts maintaining high schools ($57,904 \div .3263$)	177,456
10. Total population of all incorporated towns located in consolidated or other rural districts maintaining high schools	102,382
11. Total farm population of all consolidated districts and other districts maintaining high schools and of all incorporated towns of less than 1,000 included in them	279,838

APPENDIX

IV

**Method of Determining Proportion of Cost of Educating
Nonfarm Children Which Would Be Paid by Farm Tax-
payers if Entire State Were Reorganized for School
Purposes Under Present Iowa Laws**

1. Approximate total enrollment in Iowa public schools in 1941-42	491,000
2. Approximate total number of farm children enrolled in Iowa public schools in 1941-42	199,000
a. In rural elementary schools	115,000
b. In consolidated and other rural districts maintaining high schools	40,000
c. In town and consolidated districts as tuition pupils	44,000
3. Approximate total number of nonfarm children enrolled in Iowa public schools	292,000
4. Total estimated annual cost of maintaining all Iowa public schools if reorganized, including cost of transportation	\$49,000,000
5. Average cost per pupil in all Iowa schools if reorganized	\$99.80

Solution

Let x = amount per child paid by town taxpayers
 Then $3x$ = amount per child paid by farm taxpayers
 (Bulletin P55, Agricultural Experiment Station)

$292,000x$ = total amount paid by town taxpayers
 $597,000x$ = total amount paid by farm taxpayers
 $889,000x$ = total amount of school taxes paid by both groups
 $889,000x = 49,000,000$
 $x = 55.10$

Hence average amount per pupil paid by town taxpayers would be \$55.10.

But actual cost per child, as shown above, would be \$99.80. Therefore town property owners would pay but 55.2 percent of the cost of educating the town children, the mainder, or 44.8 percent, being paid by farm property owners.

APPENDIX

V

**Method of Estimating Percentage of Pupils Graduating
From Eighth Grade in Districts Maintaining
Only Elementary Schools**

1. Percentage of farm children (5-21) of Iowa living in consolidated districts, as shown by comparison of number of farm children in these districts with total number of school age in the state 19.3%
2. Estimated total amount of farm land in all consolidated districts (reported by H. E. Stone in 1926 as 10,254 square miles including 266 incorporated towns) 10,000 sq. mi.
3. Estimated total amount of farm land in all town independent districts of Iowa 3,280 sq. mi.
4. Percentage ratio of farm lands in town independent districts to those in consolidated districts 32.8%
5. Assuming the same density of population on the farm lands in town independent districts as on those of consolidated districts, the number of persons of school age on the farms in town independent districts is .328 times .193 of the total number of such persons on all farms of the state, or 6.3%
6. Therefore total number of children of school age on farms in consolidated and town independent districts of the state is 19.3 percent plus 6.3 percent of all such persons in the state, or 25.6%
7. Nearly all rural eighth grade graduates come from the 13-, 14- and 15-year age groups. In order to find the percentage of farm children graduating from rural schools in 1938-39, the average size of these groups, which are reported in the 1940 census as the 15-, 16- and 17-year age groups, is found. It is 18,884. This number is reduced by 25.6 percent to find

the number living in the districts having only elementary schools. The latter is thus found to be 14,020. The total number of eighth grade graduates from these schools in 1938-39 was 11,699. Therefore the percentage of eighth grade graduates from such schools was 83.4%

8. Proceeding in the same manner, we find the average size of the three groups from which the rural eighth grade graduates of 1939-40 were drawn to have been 13,935 and the number of graduates from the rural elementary schools in that year to have been 10,820. Therefore the percentage graduating from these schools in that year was 77.7%

Note: Since these were the last two school years before the opening of the World War, the average of the two, or 80.5, may apparently be taken as the approximate percentage of pupils normally graduating from the elementary schools of the state.

APPENDIX

VI

Estimate of the Aggregate Decrease in the Number of Iowa Farm Children Arising From the Decline in the Birth Rate Between 1925 and 1940

1. Farm children less than 1 year of age in 1925 numbered approximately 23,320. In 1930, the number was 19,175; and in 1940, it was 16,239.
2. Assuming the rate of decline to have been uniform from 1925 to 1930, and from 1930 to 1940, the loss in population from the 1925 level, due to the decline in the number of births, was, year by year, as follows:

In 1926, 829	In 1931, 4,338	In 1936, 5,306
In 1927, 1,658	In 1932, 4,531	In 1937, 5,499
In 1928, 2,487	In 1933, 4,724	In 1938, 5,692
In 1929, 3,316	In 1934, 4,917	In 1939, 5,885
In 1930, 4,145	In 1935, 5,113	In 1940, 6,081

Total (3 columns) 64,521

APPENDIX VII

Estimate of the Aggregate Decline in the Number of Iowa Farm Children Arising From Death and Migration

1. The number of children less than 5 years of age in 1925 was 123,322. By 1940, this group, now ranging from 15 to 19 years of age, had shrunk to 92,839. Hence the net loss was 29,483.
2. In the same way, the group less than 5 years of age in 1930, which numbered 101,147, declined in numbers to 90,262 by 1940. Hence the net loss due to migration in this group was 10,885.
3. Similarly, the group less than 5 years of age in 1935, which is estimated to have numbered 93,185^a, had declined to 82,741 by 1940. The net loss in this group was therefore 10,444.
4. The total loss of children, less than 20 years of age, from Iowa farms during the period from 1925 to 1940 was therefore 29,483 + 10,885, + 10,444, or 50,812.

^a The mean of the numbers reported for 1930 and 1940.